

Joelle Perna
Education Committee Testimony

Regarding School Construction Funds for Charter School & Support for HB 5283 & SB 229

Friday, March 4th, 2022

Hello, thank you for allowing me to voice my concerns to you all tonight. My name is Joelle Perna, I am from Waterbury and I am a parent of two boys currently enrolled at Brass City Charter School.

I am here today to not only advocate for my children and the school they currently attend but for all children in my community. I am a graduate of Waterbury Public Schools and care deeply about education in my city. In recent years, I have visited many different schools throughout the greater Waterbury area due to my children's sports, activities, other community programs, and my oldest son previously attended our local district elementary school. There is such a big difference between them. I have been in a school that had huge water spots on the ceiling, water leaking on the floor, the temperature cannot be regulated, it is either super dry and hot in the winter or cold, when the warmer weather arrived it was like an oven in there, to name a few, but then I have also been in a school that had central air conditioning, and no issues with the temperature, no visible water damage or any other repairs because it was a newer school. One school had to use the cafeteria as their gym, and auditorium, meanwhile the other school had a separate room for each.

Why are these schools being treated unequally like this? Who decides that one school should have important things that are needed to educate the children and the others should be left with not even the bare minimum? Now, on top of all of the regular costs of running a school, schools need to provide additional resources for children to protect them from COVID-19 infection. I, like most parents, have done everything possible to protect my children from the dangers surrounding COVID-19, and I know that their school wants to do the same for them. But how can I feel confident that my boys are in a safe school environment when their school is not even being given funds for basic repairs? Brass City is doing all they can to keep my children safe but they need increased funding to make sure they can balance COVID safety, building maintenance, and educational programs and resources. They need more.

This past year my boys have had to miss school, not only due to COVID-19 safety concerns, but also because of preventable building problems such as leaky roofs and bursting pipes. Our schools have enough to worry about with all the new challenges this pandemic has brought with it, they shouldn't have to worry about using money that was intended for students' education to make necessary building repairs. Meanwhile, other public schools in our state don't have to worry about things like that because they receive funding for repairs and can focus on the education like every school should be able to do. Charter schools, like Brass City, deserve reliable access to funds for maintaining their facilities.

Right now our students have increased needs and require more support to make sure they are set up for success. The federal aid is helping to make this possible but the state needs to step in to make sure this can continue. At this current funding rate, my boys will not be fully funded until they are in high school. Why should they and their classmates have to wait for the funding they deserve, especially now when we have this huge surplus? I want all children in our state to have the resources they need and the funding they deserve before the federal aid runs out which is why I support HB 5283.

I hope that you will support my children by passing HB 5283 and also by making sure all schools, including charters, have access to the funding needed to keep their buildings safe. In closing, I want to again ask that you treat my sons and their classmates the way they deserve to be treated by fully funding their education now - they shouldn't have to wait.

Thank you for your time.

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